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ABSTRACT

Social studies educators are encouraged to apply anthropological research to their understanding of classroom dynamics and the learning process. In 11 propositions, the contributions of anthropology to more effective teaching are explored. For each of these propositions, there are a number of relevant research questions to guide classroom evaluation. The propositions examined are: (1) learning and teaching are part of cultural transmission, (2) human and animal learning are different, (3) social studies learning is a process of sending and receiving, (4) social studies learning is both active and passive, (5) a child learns about his culture through natural discovery, (6) information must be perceived as useful before it is learned, (7) social studies helps students understand their social system, (8) subculture knowledge is useful in understanding student motivation, (9) social relations influence instruction, (10) learning is an evolutionary process necessary to human life, and (11) traumatic experience increases information retention. (LP)

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ELEVEN PROPOSITIONS FOR INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

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ELEVEN PROPOSITIONS FOR INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

Anthropologists are beginning to investigate the learning and teaching processes associated with American schools. They may be on the verge of shedding new light on the "what," "how," "when," "where," and "why" children learn in the formal classroom, in addition to what they learn outside the classroom and how the two are connected. While it might seem unconventional for anthropologists to investigate our modern schools, a closer look will reveal that anthropologists have been involved with the study of educational processes for some time. Their concern has been hidden by the attention that has been given to the way children learn their culture in a non-Western setting. They are now ready to apply what they have learned to American society and American schools. As a result, we may be about to re-examine learning and teaching processes from anthropological findings and conclusions. These findings and conclusions may redirect educational researchers to formulate and investigate new hypotheses that eventually could affect the way content areas (including the social studies) are taught.

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Anthropologists involved with the development of educational research are convinced that someday anthropology will rival psychology as a discipline for educational theory and research. This attitude was put forth by Solon T. Kimball when he wrote:

> "The truth is that Anthropology has produced, over the years, a rich body of data and some theory, which entitles it to claim a major and often times challenging posture, vis-a-vis psychology and other disciplines, regarding the processes of learning and its programmatic applications." 1

According to educational anthropologists, the accumulated body of anthropological knowledge associated with learning and teaching is waiting to be discovered by educators. Several major figures in anthropology have contributed to the knowledge including Margaret Mead, George and Louise Spindler, Harry Wolcott and a host of others who have focused anthropological attention on educational processes. While educators have been slow to take advantage of anthropological content, anthropologists are invading the domain of American education in order to stake their claims to the future contributions they intend to make. Unfortunately, most schools of education are slow to acknowledge the potentials available to them from the realm of anthropology education. Anthropologists currently are searching for theoretical foundations upon which to build their new enterprise. They are abandoning old psychological positions and turning inward for new anthropological learning theories and instructional approaches that may revolutionize current educational positions.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage social studies educators to investigate eleven propositions that have been extracted from anthropological literature in order to determine their value in

shedding new light on learning and teaching. They are as follows:

Proposition 1. LEARNING AND TEACHING ARE PROCESSES ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL TRANSMISSION. These processes are universal to all cultures although the specifics of the processes will vary according to cultural values and technologies. Anthropological literature contains great amounts of information on this process as the means whereby one generation passes the cultural torch to the next. Learning is more than a change in behavior; according to anthropologists it is an adaptive process associated with cultural transmission. The social studies curriculum is uniquely important to the processes of cultural transmission because it contains the important cultural information, beliefs, and skills that are needed by the student in order to sucessfully achieve adult status in American society.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to cultural transmission:

What are the optimum conditions of cultural transmission in the clasroom?

At the present time, how important is the social studies to the process of cultural transmission in American society?

Under what classroom conditions does cultural transmission occur in the social studies classroom?

Can the social studies curriculum help direct and shape American culture by influencing each succeeding generation through the development of specifically planned goals?

Proposition 2. HUMAN LEARNING IS DIFFERENT FROM ANIMAL LEARNING. Human learning is much more of a cognitive process that evokes and relies on mental images from one's cultural experiences. The social

studies should place more emphasis on cognitive processes that are derived from our culture. It should promote the development of socially positive mental images that lead to positive student behaviors. Human motivation is involved with this process as the mental world of the human being moves from the perceived realm, to the cognitive realm (the realm of images or mental pictures), to the realm of human action or human behavior. Our mental images as well as our perceived needs, goals and desires come from our culture (our human community) from which we gain our orientation. Human behavior comes from one's ability to predict how his behavior will be accepted by others. This prediction is made on past observations, experiences, and perceived outcomes.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to cognitive processes and social studies instruction:

Can we explain human learning in the social studies in light of cultural considerations?

Can the social studies curriculum promote positive social behavior by emphasizing positive social and cultural images?

Can we correct negative student social attitudes and values by demonstrating how these attitudes and values will not only harm others, but also result in personal loss to the student?

Proposition 3. LEARNING IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES IS A DUAL PROCESS. It is a process that includes sending and receiving messages. Language and its emotional and attitudinal concomitants affect our behavior and help to determine learning outcomes. The way in which messages are sent and received is determined to a great extent by the culture in which we are reared. Culture plays a role in both message

sending and message receiving in that it screens and sorts out appropriate messages from inappropriate messages. Messages sent in an inappropriate way are received differently from messages sent in an appropriate way. The results will affect both learning and behavior. The sorting mechanisms for message receiving are the cultural values that we have learned prior to our present experiences. While these values may change or may become modified, values taught at an early age are more resistant to change than values learned during the adult years.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to message sending and message receiving

Can we evaluate instruction in the social studies according to the way in which messages are sent by the teacher and received by the student?

Can we modify the value sorting system used by the student in order to gain a degree of control over the way messages are received by students?

Can we balance the processes of message transmission with message reception in order to maximize learning in the social studies? (Are we focusing too much attention on sending out messages and ignoring message receiving?)

Proposition 4. LEARNING IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CAN BE CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO TWO CATEGORIES: PASSIVE LEARNING AND PARTICIPATORY LEARNING. Passive learning consists of instructional settings in which the student does not actively participate in instruction. Participatory learning consists of instructional settings in which the student is an active participant in instruction. Anthropologists have found that participatory learning is a general

characteristic of primitive cultures, while passive learning is a general characteristic of technically advanced cultures. According to this finding, most instruction in American education, including the social studies, would be of the passive mode.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to instructional modes:

What effect does the mode of instruction have on social studies learning?

How dependent are the social studies on the passive mode of instruction?

Would instruction in the social studies be more or less effective with more of an emphasis on a participatory mode of instruction?

Proposition 5. A CHILD LEARNS HIS CULTURE NATURALLY BY DISCOVERING IT. Likewise, much of what we learn in the social studies may be most effectively taught through discovery processes. The formally organized social studies classroom, however, is more compatible with less natural and more artificially organized learning situations. The results of learning may be greatly reduced because they fail to provide for discovery opportunities.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to discovery learning:

Does the current social studies curriculum promote or discourage discovery opportunities for students? (How much of a role does discovery actually play in the "typical" social studies classroom?)

What are the long range effects of unnatural (or artificial) social studies learning situations on the cultural development of a child?

Proposition 6. WHEN SOMETHING NEW IS TO BE LEARNED IT MUST BE PERCEIVED BY THE LEARNER AS SOMETHING USEFUL TO HIM PERSONALLY. Social studies content that is not perceived as something personally useful to the student most likely will not be learned.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to the perceived usefulness of the content:

When a student perceives new social studies content as personally useful to him does he retain this content? Whereas, when new social studies content is received as not personally useful to the student is the content readily forgotten?

Can a social studies teacher modify a student's perception of content in order to affect the student's ability to retain it?

Proposition 7. INSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL TOPICS SHOULD HELP THE STUDENT UNDERSTAND RELEVANT SOCIAL SYSTEMS. This is done so that he can use this understanding to his advantage; therefore, the social studies should present a realistic view of our social systems and institutions so that the student will know the reliabilities as well as the inconsistencies of our social systems. These includes our courts, the family, government institutions, as well as our political leaders.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to learning about current social systems:

How realistic is teaching in the social studies in terms of preparing students for living and succeeding in the real world?

How accurately do our instructional materials present and describe the conditions of life and social systems in America?

How often do students participate in the actual workings of social systems that influence American lives as part of their social studies classroom work?

Proposition 8. SUBCULTURE KNOWLEDGE MAY PROVIDE NEW UNDERSTANDINGS RELATED TO STUDENT MOTIVATION. Some subcultures (Black Americans) within American society may rely on individual performances or solo performances that are appropiately used to support a group effort; however, these solo performances are not "star" performances, but expected cultural roles that the individual learns as a member of that culture. There are other subcultures (Jewish Americans) that support individual effort in order to attain individual achievement; however, when achievement is attained, that individual is expected to support other members of his group to attain a similar success. These subcultural values strongly influence the behavior and motivation of the individual who is a member of a subculture.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to student motivation:

Can we identify new teaching strategies for the social studies by studying the values and behaviors of subcultural groups that make up American society?

Will the application of sub-cultural knowledge to social studies instruction improve learning by motivating students to participate in learning processes though more natural cultural means?

When a sub-cultural group is not achievement oriented, what are the implications for social studies instruction?

Proposition 9. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS HAVE AN IMPORTANT INFLUENCE ON INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES. Anthropologists have found that some of the most important influences in the lives of children are in terms of social relationships. The following related propositions help to shed light on the influences of social relationships:

a. The most important aspects of cultural content is learned outside the classroom.

b. The cultural lessons that are learned earliest and taught by the closest kinsmen are the most resistant to change, while those lessons taught later in life by strangers are most likely to be forgotten or disregarded.

c. Those slightly older than the student are the most effective teachers of cultural content, those of greater distance in terms of age are much less influential.

d. Strangers teaching in a formal setting are the most effective teachers of ceremonial and ritual content.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to social relationships and instruction:

Can we measure the amount of social studies content that is taught outside the classroom?

Can the social studies profession influence social studies instruction that occurs outside the classroom?

Can anthropological findings that pertain to social relationships be incorporated into classroom instruction?

Proposition IV. SOCIAL LEARNING IS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS THAT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE HUMAN LIFE CYCLE. Social learning is the process of becomming a person. During this process the individual becomes a member of many groups. It is a process in which the individual plays many roles as he constantly changes his status and his responsibilities. While there are peaks, valleys, and plateaus connected with this process, it does not begin or end with the K-12 curriculum. Social studies teachers have the opportunity of directly influencing social learning by providing models and knowledge that will help the individual adjust to changes that will affect his life.

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to the process of social learning:

Can we identify the life cycle processes connected with social learning that the individual will experience during his lifetime?

How much influence does social studies education have on social learning during the years of formal instruction in the public schools?

Can we develop social studies programs that will help the individual deal more successfully with changes in role and status that will occur during his life experiences?

Propositon 11. THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RETENTION AND TRAUMA. This relationship can be used to promote learning under certain circumstances. Most advanced cultures incorporate the use of ceremony and ritual to mark changes in status. Known as "rite of passage," these events typically bear witness or validate the new

roles, rights, and/or privileges that are bestowed on individuals and groups. George Spindler refers to this as:

> The abrupt and dramatized changes in roles during adolescence, the sudden compression of cultural requirements, and all the techniques used by preceptors, who are nearly always adults from within the cultural system, educate an individual to be committed to the system. 2

The age of adolescence is characterized by important changes in both biological development (throught puberty) and dramatic changes in social roles (throught social expectancies). Changes in social role are accompanied by changes that include ceremonies. In many cases, these ceremonies require some type of proof of worthiness. As a rule, these activities create a certain amount of anticipation and anxiety for those who must successfully complete these "exercises." These events are remembered vividly by those who must face and pass the test. This may be due to its perceived importance to the family and other members of the individual's immediate community. Typically the whole community helps prepare the individual and takes an active interest in his success. Trauma, when used appropriately, may promote retention and help to establish the link that exists between learning and the circumstances of learning at the secondary level of education.

Social studies teachers tend to prefer less traumatic circumstances in the classroom, as do most school officials and most parents. In spite of these preferences, there may be some routinely prescribed activities that can be used in connection with social studies instruction that will make use of trauma in order to improve retention. Competitions, games, final examinations, contests, etc. have all been used in the classroom as a means of promoting learning through trauma; however, we have tended to neglect family and community involvement in these activities. What if we formed family

and community learning teams in connection with a mid-term or end of the year activity or ceremony? Would it affect social studies learning and retention?

Investigations

Research questions pertaining to the use of trauma and retention:

What is the relationship between trauma and retention?

Under what circumstances might trauma be used as a positive influence in classroom instruction?

Can we identify specific social studies activities that includes the positive use of trauma in the school or the classroom?

CONCLUSION

Anthropologists are just now beginning to exert some influence in the areas of teaching and learning. For decades they have accumulated studies related to the ways that various peoples learn and pass on their knowledge and culture from one generation to the next. Education, on the other hand, is ready and willing to look at the processes of teaching and learning from new perspectives. Therefore, anthropology education has the opportunity to advance its cause by helping educators interpret the culture of the classroom so that education can become more effective. Harry Wolcott has stated that the greatest contribution that anthropology offers the educator is not its methodoloy, but rather the ability of anthropology to make sense out of the real world. 2 Wolcott's statement can be best understood in light of the writings of Clyde Kluckhohn regarding the nature of

anthropology. Kluckhohn wrote:

> To discover something about the limits and potentialities of human nature, to see how this universal nature is molded by varying cultures, and especially to learn something about those nonrational cultural responses which appear to the naive view to possess almost the automatic character of "instinctive" reactions--this is no mere academic query. The fate of our Western civilization and perhaps of civilization in general may hang upon humanity's gaining some orderly and systematic insight into the nonrational and irrational factors in human behavior. 3

The eleven propositions presented in this paper are an attempt to demonstrate ways in which anthropological perspectives can be applied to the social studies classroom and help the classroom teacher make sense out of social behaviors that are both rational and irrational. Anthropological field studies provide clues to learning and teaching that go beyond reason into the domain of culture, a domain that is realistic and holistic.

ENDNOTES

1. Kimball, Solon T., "Community and Hominid Emergence," ANTHROPOLOGY AND EDUCATION QUARTERLY, 13(Summer 1982) p. 127.

2. Spindler, George D., EDUCATION AND CULTURAL PROCESS: TOWARD AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF EDUCATION, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), p.302.

3. Weaver, Thomas, TO SEE OURSELVES: ANTHROPOLOGY AND MODERN SOCIAL ISSUES, (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973) p. 1.

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Solon T. Kimball, "Community and Hominid Emergence," ANTHROPOLOGY AND EDUCATION QUARTERLY, 13(Summer 1982) pp. 125-

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